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SUBJECT: WHO: 58TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY: ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE MIDDLE EAST CANCER CONSORTIUM (MECC) MINISTERIAL
STEERING COMMITTEE

REF: STATE 82773

1. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Michael
O. Leavitt chaired the annual meeting of the Middle East
Cancer Consortium (MECC) Ministerial Steering Committee
during the World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva,
Switzerland, May 18, 2005. Ministers of Health from Israel,
Turkey, the Palestinian Authority, the Arab Republic of
Egypt, the Republic of Cyprus, and the Hashemite Kingdom of
Jordan participated in the meeting.

2. Also present for the meeting were MECC Executive Director
Dr. Michael Silberman; MECC Chair Dr. Samir Al-Kayed; Dr.
Benjamin O. Anderson, Program Director of the Breast Health
Global Initiative at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research
Center in Seattle, Washington, and a public member of the
U.S. Delegation to the WHA; and members of the U.S.
Delegation to WHA including: Dr. William Steiger, Special
Assistant to the Secretary for International Affairs (HHS)
and Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director, HHS Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention; and Dr. Joe Harford, Associate
Director for International Affairs, National Cancer
Institute, HHS National Institutes of Health, who serves as
the HHS Liaison to MECC. This was the first opportunity for
Secretary Leavitt and MECC colleagues to meet one another.

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Most Ministers are new to the MECC; the only Minister who had
participated in previous MECC meetings was Minister Danny
Naveh of Israel. As a result, much of the meeting was given
over to personal and professional introductions.

3. Secretary Leavitt opened the meeting with the following
prepared remarks:

BEGIN QUOTE: Good afternoon. I would like to welcome you to
this meeting of the Middle East Cancer Consortium. It's an
honor and a pleasure to join this esteemed group of
Ministers.

I'm looking forward to collaborating with you to reduce the
ravages of cancer in the Middle East. ... I want to tell you
how much I'm looking forward to building upon this
Consortium's work. I know it's had a record of considerable
success, particularly in the development of cancer registries
and the training of health providers. I'd like to expand
that to addressing risky behaviors, such as tobacco use, poor
diet, and lack of physical activity. By encouraging healthy
habits, we could eliminate much of the suffering and death
caused by cancer, since many cancers develop because of poor
decisions people make.

Your work is especially significant this year, given that
cancer prevention and control is an important part of the
Assembly's agenda. I believe we have the opportunity here to
discuss how the WHO and its Member States can collaborate to
prevent cancer, improve diagnoses, and strengthen
surveillance systems.

I'd like to spend most of our time together on the
Consortium's Ministers' vision for cancer treatment and
prevention initiatives, and on how strong health promotion
approaches could help our efforts. I'd also like to hear how
my Department as well as the Consortium could help you in
your own countries' efforts to prevent cancer and disease.
END QUOTE.

4. MECC Executive Director Michael Silberman asked
Secretary Leavitt for continued HHS support of the MECC. MECC

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Ministers agreed to pursue a 2005 follow-up meeting in Egypt.
Dr. Silberman will also explore with HHS ways to mark the
tenth anniversary of the establishment of the MECC at the
2006 Ministerial meeting.

5. Comment: The MECC represents an under used avenue for
U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East. HHS should explore
with posts in MECC Member States and with the public
diplomacy staff at the Department ways to use the MECC as a
strategy of "health diplomacy" in the region. End Comment.
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